



Studying the Gender Gap between Intelligence and Marriage

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Abstract: From a 2005 study, researchers observe that for every 16-point increase in IQ, the likelihood of marriage increases by 35% for men and decreases by 58% for women. This article intends to explain and interpret this phenomenon. Three major factors are proposed from the perspectives of evolutionary psychology and modern work-life balance. From evolutionary psychology, women tend to choose men with more economic resources so that they can provide for the family. Across centuries, intelligence is a positive indicator of economic resources. From work-life balance, intelligent women face the risk of losing career potential from marriage as they are expected to take on child-caring responsibilities. It causes some intelligent women to give up family life, while others seek more resourceful mates to ensure family security. After analyzing the causes, this article calls for action for corporates and individuals to work together to eliminate the gender gap.

Keywords: Evolutionary Psychology, Gender Studies, Marriage, Work-life Balances, Social Studies, Corporate Life

My mother is the CFO of a financial technology company. I have looked up to her all my life because she is ambitious, hardworking, and an exemplary role model. My mother told me that her success consisted of hard work and opportunities. However, such success is rare, especially for women, as it is challenging to maintain a balance between family lives and work. As such, many of her colleagues often had to choose between family and career success. Along my mother's path, she has seen countless driven and intelligent women stop climbing the corporate ladder because of the responsibilities of having a family and raising children. In response to these pressures, many women who have achieved remarkable success have chosen not to get married or have a traditional family life. Indeed, research supports this observation. Among professors in STEM, only 50% of women are married with children, compared to 72% of men (Williams & Ceci, 2012). This research suggests a positive correlation between intelligence and marriage for men but a negative correlation for women. Further supporting this idea, a study by Taylor and colleagues (2005) found that for every 16-point increase in IQ, the likelihood of marriage increases by 35% for men and decreases by 58% for women. Similarly, a study by Jaakko Aspara (2018) found that brainy men were more likely to get married and stay married. From a resource acquisition perspective, I argue that intelligent women face a greater risk of losing future resources through marriage and, thus, will often opt out of traditional family life. Meanwhile, intelligent men do not face the same risk.

Evolutionary psychology can provide some insights into why this occurs. According to evolutionary psychology, human behavior can be traced back to traits that helped our ancestors survive (Cosmides, 1997). The reproduction costs of prehistoric women were far higher compared to men. Therefore, they needed to make careful choices regarding their spouse. In our ancestors' eyes, intelligent men were seen as more resourceful and thus more able to protect their spouses and children (Buss, 2016). Put simply, a man with a larger share of assets could provide food, find shelter, and protect his children, which was crucial for safely raising his children to a reproductive age. Therefore, to secure her reproductive success, a woman had to choose an able and intelligent man as a spouse (Buss, 2016). According to evolutionary psychologists, humans pass down these preferences through generations, so today, women still strongly prefer more resourceful men. Modern research indeed proves this notion. Research from the 1930s to the present day has consistently found that American women put significantly more emphasis on the economic status of their spouses than men do (Hudson and Henze, 1969; McGinnis, 1958; Hill, 1945; Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 2001; Schmitt, 2016). From an

evolutionary standpoint, intelligence is a positive indicator of economic success (Jencks, 1979). More intelligent people tend to perform better in school, achieve a higher level of education, and eventually gain higher-earning jobs. Even in tribal societies, the leaders are usually more intelligent than average members (Herrnstein, 1989; Brown, 1991). Therefore, as women seek mates with ample economic resources, they will likely turn to more intelligent men.

However, what does this mean for intelligent women? According to research, resourceful women, or those who can provide for themselves, put even more emphasis on economic resources when choosing a mate (Buss, 2016). Unfortunately for them, this criteria turns down a significant part of the male population, which leads more intelligent women to be more selective in choosing a mate. Additionally, there are more risks associated with marriage for women, especially brilliant women. For one, marriage does not help advance a woman's career. Married women are underrepresented across areas like business and academia, where the time dedication to work is enormous (Williams and Ceci, 2012). While discrimination plays a part in this (Heilman, 2012), according to the National Research Council (2010), female applicants are actually more likely to be interviewed and offered jobs than their male competitors. Therefore, some researchers have proposed that it is not the gender stereotypes but the work time involved in child-bearing that is what hinders a woman's career success. In their paper on the underrepresentation of women in the STEM fields, Williams and Ceci (2012) mention the real-life example of Jennifer. Jennifer was an extremely talented post-doc in engineering with bright prospects of becoming an engineering professor. However, at 33 years old, she quit the academic tenure track to raise a family. Jennifer knew she could not balance child-bearing and the intense workload needed to get tenured. She ended up having a family and teaching mathematics at a local community college without reaching her full career potential. Research by Leslie (2007) has shown that the more children a woman has, the fewer hours per week she spends on her professional work. Interestingly, the exact opposite is true for men. A possible explanation is that when men marry, they more often have stay-at-home spouses who take care of the children and the household while they can put more of their energy into their careers. According to Parker from the PEW Research Center (2015), only 6% of families have the father working part-time or unemployed while the mother works full-time. In contrast, 43% of families have the father working full-time and the mother working part-time or unemployed. A letter by world-renowned scientist Albert Einstein to his wife reflects this distribution of labor: "You will make sure: 1. that my clothes and laundry are kept in good order; 2. that I will receive three meals regularly in my room; 3. that my bedroom and study are kept neat, and especially my desk is left for my use only" (Buffalmano, 2018). Einstein's example illustrates that his wife took care of his personal and social life so that he could focus on his academic work. Unfortunately, the same luxury is not offered to women. If women can't work as much as men, it will be hard for them to perform as well in their careers. Therefore, it is difficult for women to balance their careers and family lives.

Women today are more aware than ever of the choice they have to make between work and family. According to research by Lyness and Judiesch (1999), opportunities opened up for women by the beginning of the 21st century as the attention to gender equality increased. A study by Leslie (2017) found that women labeled as employees with "high potential" by their managers were indeed paid more than their male counterparts who were labeled as "high potential." As a result, many successful career women of high intelligence, even though some yearn for children, give up traditional family life and fully dedicate themselves to career success. In 2002, 49% of women ultra-achievers in corporates were unmarried (Hewlett, 2002). Many women on paths toward a successful career have expressed discomfort with marriage and see traditional family life as a hindrance to their career prospects. On the other hand, many other women compromise their careers to fulfill family responsibilities. In a study by Mazerolle and Eason (2015) on the work-life balance of female athletic trainers in National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I institutions, a recently married female athletic trainer expressed concerns about her balance between being a dedicated athletic trainer and a caring mother. Comparing herself to mothers who work part-time or do not work, she was afraid she could not live up to the standard of nurturing a child while traveling and working in season. A similar study showed that female physicians are significantly more likely to burn out because of the overwhelming family responsibilities on top of their workload (Lyubarova et al., 2023). Outside these professions, women in many demanding jobs, such as politics and law, believed that it is unlikely that they can adhere to the long working hours and be present for their children (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015). Therefore, these women tend to quit their careers sooner than their male counterparts for

family reasons. For a woman to make this conscious decision to leave her chosen career and devote herself to family life, it is reasonable for her to choose a more resourceful mate to cover for the future loss of her income and ensure security for herself and her children. Finding this type of mate is challenging and sometimes impossible for highly intelligent women.

Looking at human history from its origins to the current society, we can attribute the phenomenon of intelligent women being less likely to marry than intelligent men to evolutionary strategies and work-life imbalance. It is also a phenomenon that we do not wish to see. Inequalities persist when society denies intelligent women the likelihood of a satisfactory marriage and a happy family life. While part of this is based on our evolution, we can still work to improve the societal support for women to balance their family life and careers. Such practices can involve flexible working times to accommodate sick or young children and changing the evaluation system of work that requires more than 60 hours per week (Williams and Ceci, 2012). While employees have the option for flexibility, it is also beneficial for employers to provide a predictable schedule for a working mother to arrange childcare. On-call shifts, shift timing changes, work hour volatility, and short advance notice of work schedules are associated with difficulty arranging childcare and work-life conflict (Luhr et al. 2022). Further, practices that accommodate childcare can significantly reduce burdens on women. According to Knowledge Brief from California State Portal (n.d.), two of the ten best practices for companies are reducing childcare costs and assisting working parents in finding childcare. As a Forbes report on the Taylor study presented in the prompt says, “If the reader of this article is worried about her prospects of finding a mate due to her intelligence, she should rest easy knowing that while there may be many obstacles on her path, her IQ isn’t one of them.” I hope that when we conduct similar research in 2050, corporations and individuals can work together to eliminate the gender gap regarding marriage.

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